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AD HOC COMMITTEE ON THE INDIAN OCEAN

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 39th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 18 April 1977, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. JOEWONO (Indonesia)

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The meeting was called to order at 11.a.m.

IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 31/88

1. The CHAIRMAN said that the Ad Hoc Committee was scheduled to hold two sessions in 1977, the first from 18 to 24 April and the second from 19 to 23 September, in order to carry out its mandate from the General Assembly under resolution 31/88.

2. While in 1976 the work of the Committee had been so slow as to cause concern to some delegations, in 1977 some progress seemed possible. During the past year there had been a somewhat more positive response to the objectives of the Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace.

3. Specifically, in paragraph 2 of its resolution 31/88, the General Assembly requested the Ad Hoc Committee and the littoral and hinterland States of the Indian Ocean to continue their consultations with a view to formulating a programme of action leading to the convening of a conference on the Indian Ocean, and in paragraph 3 it had invited once again all States, in particular the great Powers and the major maritime users of the Indian Ocean, to co-operate in a practical manner with the Ad Hoc Committee in the discharge of its functions. With regard to paragraph 3 of the resolution, he had just sent a letter to the permanent representatives of the great Powers and the major maritime users of the Indian Ocean to invite them once more to participate in the work of the Ad Hoc Committee, emphasizing the importance attached by the littoral and hinterland States of that ocean to their participation, and to ask them to communicate their views on implications for their security and other interests of the proposal to make the Indian Ocean a zone of peace and on the best means for achieving that goal, indicating such modifications as might be found necessary to reconcile the views and interests of the various States. Although the preceding year's invitation to those States had not been accorded the response hoped for by the Committee, during the past 12 months certain major Powers seemed to have adopted a more positive approach with regard to the objectives of the Declaration.

4. With regard to the Ad Hoc Committee's consultations with the littoral and hinterland States of the Indian Ocean, he invited the members of the Committee to make suggestions concerning the procedure to be adopted.

5. Mr. RODRIGO (Sri Lanka) said it was regrettable that in spite of repeated invitations from the General Assembly and the Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Countries, certain great Powers and certain major maritime users of the Indian Ocean had not found it possible to co-operate with the Ad Hoc Committee. Furthermore, the great-Power rivalry and the escalation in military activity in that vital region gave cause for growing concern. However, it was heartening to find that the question of demilitarizing the Indian Ocean, or

(Mr. Rodrigo, Sri Lanka)

at least limiting the arms race in the region, was being seriously considered. The great Powers now seemed prepared, at least in principle, to study the possibility of controlling their arms race in the Indian Ocean. Certain recent statements made by the President of the United States of America and preliminary discussions between the great Powers suggested the likelihood of a meeting in May 1977 at which the question of the demilitarization of the Indian Ocean would be considered. It might be overoptimistic to expect concrete results from that meeting, but there was reason to see it as showing that the Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace was making some impact on the thinking of the great Powers.

6. He believed that the Chairman should continue his consultations with the two great Powers concerned and encourage them to agree to co-operate with the Ad Hoc Committee.

7. Mr. MOHAJER (Iran), recalling that the major problem encountered by the Ad Hoc Committee was that it was getting no co-operation from the great Powers and some of the major maritime users of the Indian Ocean, welcomed the fact that some causes for hope had appeared in the past few months. In the memorandum of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the cessation of the arms race and on disarmament, the text of which had been communicated to the General Assembly at its thirty-first session, the Soviet Union had made it clear that it would be prepared to study the question of its attitude concerning the convening of a conference on the Indian Ocean. Moreover, the President and the Secretary of State of the United States of America had recently made statements on possibilities and options concerning the Indian Ocean. He believed that, on the basis of that memorandum and those statements, the Ad Hoc Committee should approach the Soviet Union and the new United States administration in order to obtain their co-operation.

8. While he commended the Chairman for his new invitation to the great Powers to co-operate in the work of the Committee, he felt that an initiative at the official level was not sufficient; the Chairman should supplement that initiative with personal consultations of a private nature. However, on that subject he would accept the views of the other members of the Committee.

9. Mr. MULYE (India) said that the idea of sending a letter to the great Powers and the proposals made by the representatives of Sri Lanka and Iran were all the more valuable because new opportunities appeared to have opened recently to the Committee. Until now, the Committee had been frustrated in its work by the lack of co-operation from the great Powers and the major maritime users not represented in the Committee. However, at the thirty-first session of the General Assembly the USSR had declared its readiness to participate in consultations which would lead to the convening of a conference on the Indian Ocean. The United States, for its part, had shown some interest in demilitarizing the Indian Ocean, or at least in slowing the arms race in that region. The Committee should, of course, avoid overoptimism, as the representative of Sri Lanka had said, but the fact remained that

(Mr. Mulye, India)

the initiatives that might be taken by the Chairman to determine what change there had been in the position of the great Powers deserved the Committee's full support. For his part, he left it entirely to the Chairman's discretion to decide what action should be taken. With regard to the letter, he would like to know whether it was intended to invite the great Powers to the Committee or to propose the holding of informal meetings with them. In the past the approach using informal meetings had often proved useful.

10. The CHAIRMAN, replying to the representative of India on the question of whether it was preferable to invite the great Powers officially or to interest them in informal consultations, said that the decision would depend on what the great Powers themselves had in mind and what they would consider the best means of co-operating with the Committee. As he understood it, his task would be to consult with the delegations of the great Powers, and on the basis of the results of such consultations, the Committee would decide the manner in which it would ask the great Powers to participate in its work.

11. Mr. OXLEY (Australia) said that he approved of the general line of action described by the Chairman and also emphasized the need for retaining the necessary flexibility. Like other representatives, he recognized that the Committee could find some cause for encouragement in press reports. The great Powers apparently had the intention of concerning themselves with the question of the Indian Ocean on a bilateral basis. While the Committee had been able to observe some progress with regard to the Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace, it had to ascertain more clearly the attitude of the great Powers, and it was therefore useful that the Chairman should undertake consultations to that end.

12. Mr. RASOLONDRAIBE (Madagascar) commended the Chairman's action in sending a letter to the Powers whose co-operation the Committee was trying to obtain.

13. His delegation could not help feeling some scepticism concerning the press reports on the Indian Ocean; if there was an intention to deal with the problems of that ocean, why not do so in the Ad Hoc Committee, which included all the countries concerned? It would be preferable if those who were disturbing the peace and security of the Indian Ocean region would state their intentions before the Committee. The procedure described by the Chairman was acceptable; as other representatives had said, it was important to remain as flexible as possible, since the question was of great importance, and care must be taken to avoid destroying bridges by immoderate demands. In any case, the great Powers had the duty to keep the Committee informed of the substance of their discussions concerning the Indian Ocean, since the members of the Committee were those most concerned.

14. Mr. KUBBA (Iraq) asked whether the Chairman, in his consultations with the great Powers, would try to determine in what way they would be prepared to co-operate with the Committee or would ask their views on the problem in general.

15. The CHAIRMAN said that he would endeavour to obtain information on both of the subjects mentioned by the representative of Iraq. If there was no objection, he would take it that the Committee was entrusting him with the task of entering into consultation without delay with the Powers concerned, in order to discuss with them the co-operation they would give the Committee in the discharge of its functions, and reporting to the Committee at its next meeting, which would be held during the same week.

16. It was so decided.

ORGANIZATION OF THE COMMITTEE'S WORK

17. The CHAIRMAN asked the members of the Committee to state their views on how the 10 meetings assigned to the current session should be utilized.

18. Mr. KUBBA (Iraq) felt that, as the representative of Iran had indicated, the real problems lay in the attitude of the great Powers and the subsequent work of the Committee would depend on the results of the Chairman's consultations.

19. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the date of the next meeting should be fixed on the basis of the results obtained in his consultations with the great Powers, which should take one or two days.

20. It was so decided.

21. The CHAIRMAN recalled that, in accordance with paragraph 2 of General Assembly resolution 31/88, the Committee should continue its consultations with the littoral and hinterland States of the Indian Ocean. Meetings for that purpose should be held during the current session. He believed that it would be preferable to hold such consultations after he had carried out the task just entrusted to him and had reported to the Committee.

22. Mr. MOHAJER (Iran) said that after private consultations with the major maritime users of the Indian Ocean, it had been found that they did not intend to take a position before the Committee had obtained more co-operation from the great Powers. From that standpoint too, therefore, it was preferable to await the results of the Chairman's consultations.

23. The CHAIRMAN said that if the Committee had no objection, a decision on the consultations with the littoral and hinterland States of the Indian Ocean would be taken at the Committee's next meeting, after the Committee had heard his report on his consultations with the great Powers.

24. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at noon.